



Women in Labour-held Councils in England

In recent months Labour Women's Network has been alarmed by the apparent absence of women from many of the debates around regional devolution in England. Prior to that, we had already been concerned by the seemingly low level of women in leadership roles in Labour Groups, and had raised the issue with the Party on a number of occasions.

In order to get a clearer picture of what is happening we looked at the make-up of 100 Labour Groups in Labour-controlled Leader and cabinet/executive style councils in England.

We found that:

- 40% of Labour councillors on Labour-held authorities are women
- 20% of leaders are women
- 36% of deputy leaders are women
- 36% of portfolio-holders are women
- 50% of women leaders head cabinets which are 50% or more female
- 11% of male leaders head cabinets/executives which are more than 50% female
- Nearly two thirds of labour local authorities (63%) don't comply with the Party's own rules on gender representation, with half (49%) missing the target by more than 5%

In one Council - Crawley - there are no women portfolio-holders at all, despite 21% of Labour councillors being female.

1. Labour Group/Council Leaders

In England, 16% of Councils of all political complexions are women, and it is therefore pleasing that Labour, at 20%, is ahead of the game. However, the representation of women at this level is lower than at MP, MEP or devolved parliament/assembly member level, and runs well behind the percentage of Labour councillors overall.

Half of women leaders head cabinets/executives which are at least 50% female, whilst only 2 have cabinets/executives which are below 30% female.

2. Labour Groups

Only nine of the 100 Labour Groups we looked at are more than 50% female - Rossendale (63%), Oxford (61%), Newcastle-under-Lyme (55%), Exeter (54%), Stevenage (53%), Redditch (53%), Bradford (52%), Bury (52%), and Lambeth (50%).

11 have less than 30% women councillors: - Blackburn (15%), Preston (19%), Crawley (21%), North East Lincolnshire (21%), Warrington (21%), Pendle (22%), Ipswich (25%), Cambridge City (29%), Coventry (29%), Hastings (30%), and Redbridge (29%).

It is not clear to what degree the Party's requirements in terms of positive action in local government candidate selection processes are being implemented, but the available information suggests that it is patchy at best.

3. Cabinets and Executives

Chapter 13, Clause VI 1. of the Labour Party's rules require that:

'As a minimum, the gender balance of the Labour group executive will reflect the gender balance of the Labour group as a whole. Any deviation from this will require consent from (the) RD (GS).'

From the two tables below it will be seen that a large number of Labour Groups deviate from this rule. This is a matter of concern, since it means that the routes into leadership roles for women are increasingly restricted, and this failure to promote women to portfolio-holding roles at least in part explains why the numbers of women Council leaders is so low.

Of the 19 cabinets/executives listed below, 10 are led by women.

Labour Council Cabinets/Executives which are 50% or more female. (19)

Local Authority Labour Group	Leader	Deputy	Cabinet % Female	Labour Group % Female
Carlisle	m	f	67%	43%
Lambeth	f	m	60%	50%
Rossendale	f	f	60%	63%
Sheffield	f	m	60%	45%
Oldham	f	m	57%	33%
Barking & Dagenham	m	f	56%	37%
Stevenage	f	m	56%	53%
Thurrock	m	f	56%	44%
Brent	m	m	50%	41%
Camden	f	f	50%	44%
Croydon	m	f	50%	43%
Exeter	m	f	50%	54%
Greenwich	f	m	50%	40%
Lancaster	f	f	50%	45%
Leeds	f	m/f	50%	48%
Newcastle	m	f	50%	43%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	f	m	50%	55%
Wakefield	m	f	50%	43%
Warrington	m	m	50%	21%

Labour Council Cabinets/Executives which are less than 30% female. (31)

Local Authority Labour Group	Leader	Deputy	Cabinet % Female	Labour Group % Female
Allerdale	m	m	29%	37%
Darlington	m	m	29%	48%
Gedling	m	m	29%	44%
Harlow	m	f	29%	37%
Knowsley	m	m	29%	38%
Northumberland	m	m	29%	44%
Stockton-on-Tees	m	m	29%	47%
Bolton	m	f	25%	33%
Calderdale	m	m	25%	46%
Milton Keynes	m	f	25%	30%
Slough	m	m	25%	34%
Southampton	m	m	25%	36%
Sunderland	m	m	25%	47%
Waltham Forest	m	m	25%	35%
West Lancashire	m	f	25%	37%
Corby	m	f	20%	33%
Derbyshire	f	m	20%	37%
Halton	m	m	20%	35%
Kingston upon Hull	m	m	20%	43%
Nottingham	m	m	20%	40%
Plymouth	m	m	20%	33%
Chorley	m	m	17%	32%
Hyndburn	m	m	17%	42%
Pendle	m	m (Lib Dem)	17%	22%
Preston	m	m	17%	19%
Cambridge City	m	f	14%	29%
Lancashire	f	m	14%	34%
Norwich	m	f	14%	41%
Wigan	m	m	13%	33%
Blackburn with Darwen	m	m	11%	15%
Crawley	m	m	0%	21%

4. Conclusions and Demands

Labour Women's Network notes that a significant number of Labour Groups are failing to observe the Party's own rules as they relate to gender representation in senior roles, and, furthermore, that the Party itself is failing to enforce those rules.

This is feeding through into a serious gender imbalance at local government leadership level, which in turn has 2 serious and immediate consequences:

- a) Since women leaders are much more likely to have high levels of women in cabinet/executive posts, the absence of women from the most senior leadership roles is having the effect of limiting the numbers of women portfolio-holders;
- b) Women are being under-represented in discussions and negotiations around the devolution agenda, and, if action is not taken, are increasingly likely to be excluded from local and regional decision-making in England.

Although we only looked at 100 Labour-controlled Councils there is no reason to believe that the position is significantly better in those authorities in which Labour is in opposition.

This is not acceptable.

Labour Women's Network therefore demands that:

1. The Party enforces Rule 13.VI.1. in all Labour Groups
2. The Party enforces its positive action requirements in all local government selections
3. The Party takes urgent action to address the serious under-representation of women at leadership level in local government